CONGO NEWS-LETTER

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THE "CONGO EVIL"

The true nature of the Congo evil is not yet fully understood in America. It needs to be more precisely defined.

It is often assumed that this iniquity is confined to the territory of the Congo State. This is a mistake. It must be remembered that the *concessionaire system*, as it has been developed under the sinister genius of the King of Belgium, has been a great commercial success. This fact makes it dangerous. Already France feels herself driven by competition and the desire to put her colonies on a self-sustaining basis, to follow in her Congo possessions the example of her neighbor in the Free State. The evil is contagious and unless suppressed is likely to extend itself to the whole western littoral.

It is customary to refer to the Congo evil as a case of mal-administration. This is a Belgian view and is misleading. A policy, on the whole well intentioned, might be open to criticism in its results; this is particularly true where, as in the Congo State, one is dealing with savage peoples scattered over a vast territory. But in this case it is not the administration, but the policy that is at fault. There is no feebleness in the administration of the Congo Free State. On the contrary, the untiring vigor with which its iniquitous system is everywhere enforced, indicates the directive of an evil genius, whose policy is all the more sinister because it is conducted with unparalleled skill and success.

The Congo State is frequently referred to as a "Belgian colony" and it is assumed that it is conducted under the authority of the Belgian State. This again is a mistake. The Congo State is wholly independent of Belgium. The King has more than once asserted his right to deal with the Congo as with his own. The right to discuss its affairs has been denied members of the Belgian parliament. The King has mortgaged, willed away and parcelled out to the control of monopolistic companies not only its 800,000 acres of land, but also its 20,000,000 of people, as if they were his personal property. This assertion does not touch the question of his right. That is a question of international law. It merely describes the authority that the King actually wields there. Practically the Congo and its people belong to Leopold, as Legree said of Uncle Tom—"body and soul."

The King's interest in the Free State has been described as "philanthropic" and "sentimental." This legend was started long ago innocently enough by Henry M. Stanley and by other early promoters of the Congo State, and has since been kept alive by the King and his supporters. Legends die hard. After one has torn from them every shred of fact on which they might have subsisted they still linger on in the shadowy background of the popular consciousness, and still modify public opinion.

As a matter of fact, it is doubtful if, in the long intrigue which has put him in possession of the Congo State, Leopold has been influenced even by patriotic motives. In 1891 the Congo State was bankrupt, and the King needed funds to complete his railway. He thereupon mortgaged it to Belgium, promising to turn over the whole property in ten years to the Belgian people. This promise he did not keep. At the end of ten years he managed it so that he still remains as heretofore in full possession, and he now seems to be seeking an arrangement by which he can hand over, practically intact, his absolute control of the Congo to a successor appointed by himself.

The New York *Sun* came much nearer the truth in regard to the King, when it characterized him the other day as "a dissolute miser, who deprived his own wife of her private fortune while she was alive, and stole it from his daughters on a legal quibble when she was dead."

By a similar legal quibble this same "dissolute miser" has deprived the natives of Africa of several hundred million dollars' worth of land, with the care of which he was entrusted by the Powers, and by still another legal quibble has reduced these inhabitants, whose "moral regeneration" he took upon himself, to the position of serfs upon their own soil.

It is asserted in defense of the Congo government that stories of atrocities, of which for twelve years past we have had persistent complaints, are inventions of the agents of the British government. This assertion is merely rhetorical. They are, on the contrary, the inventions—if we are to regard them as fabrications—of American and English missionaries, of travellers and of the early associates of King Leopold in the founding of the Free State. The official reports of the British Consul did not "invent" any new tales of cruelties, but merely confirmed testimony of those devoted men, who for ten years have been urging upon England its duty in West Africa, not only in regard to the Congo State but also in regard to the native peoples of its own possessions.

One of the first and most heroic of these "calumniators" of the King was a Swedish missionary Sjöblom, sent out to Africa by the American Baptist Missionary Union, who practically sacrificed his life in the effort to call the attention of the world to the destruction of the Congo peoples that has been going on under the name of philanthropy and progress in the Free State.

Not the English government, but the English people, are the aggressors in this matter. This distinction M. de Wiart, the latest defender of the King, was careful to make in an interview in the New York *Sun* and the New York *Herald* a few weeks ago. At a time when the Congo government is seeking to induce England to accept its own investigation of itself as meeting the requirements of the English note demanding an international inquiry, this distinction is important to Belgian policy. "Distinguished Belgian prelates" and others engaged in defending the King and the *concessionaire system* through letters to the American newspapers will please take notice.

Hitherto the King, by ascribing impossible aspirations to the English government, has succeeded in fostering international jealousies in such a way as to paralyze international action. But that is past. In the policy favored by Leopold no stone will be put in its way should the English government, wearied with more personal anxieties, wish to evade the demand of the English people, and give up what seems, perhaps, a vain and sentimental enterprise.

It has been said that the present conditions in the Congo are the unfortunate but necessary consequences of the effort to introduce civilization among a savage people. Wherever civilized have come into contact with savage races, the same terrible process has taken place. The negro, it is urged, like the Indian, is a lower type of animal, who is bound to recede before the superior vigor of the white race. It is a law of nature that we are helpless to resist.

This is false philosophy. Laws of nature impose no obligations. They simply tell us what will happen in a given case if nothing else intervenes. Laws of nature do not hinder, but rather invite our intervention. Besides the case of the Indian and the negro are not parallel. The negro dwells in the tropics, a land whose permanent occupation is forever forbidden to the white race. The white man is and always will be an alien in equatorial Africa. It is not a white man's country, and the effect of the climate upon him is in every way, morally and physically deteriorating. If the vast wealth of the tropics is ever to be made available for the whole of the civilized world, it can only be by preserving the negro. To allow the black races of Africa to perish would be, from the point of view of world politics, a fatal error.

The negro must be taught to work. He must be inspired with desire for a higher existence, with the hope of attaining it, and the ambition to work for it, for himself and for his race. To rob him of his heritage, to deprive him of the natural fruits of the land which belongs to him, and to which he belongs, to degrade him to a mere beast of burden in the service of a civilization and "progress" in which he has no share, and from which he reaps no reward, is not only cruel but if there yet remains anything to which we "enlightened" men can apply that word—it is wicked.

It is an error to assume that the worst thing about the policy of the present administration is the mere waste of human life that it entails. It is not war that is complained of here, but oppression, cruel, damnable oppression, due in the first instance to the stupidity and lack of imagination of a bureaucratic government in the hands of an absentee autocrat and, secondarily, to the inordinate thrift and greed of a petty people that in its thirst for gold has lost its sense of national responsibility.

The worst thing about the so-called Belgian system is that in the breaking down of family and tribal relations, the corruption of morals and the spread of disease that it entails, it robs the native of all present happiness in existence, and takes away all hope for his future regeneration and betterment. It makes missionary work or any effort to lift the natives to a higher and happier plane of existence, on the terms that it prescribes, impossible. Any missionary enterprise that attempts to go hand in hand with a commercial policy so ruthless as that of the present government will find it hard to defend itself against the charge of systematic hypocrisy. Small wonder, under the circumstances, that Christianity finds it difficult to stem the steady progress of Mohammedanism among the natives.

It is often asserted that the United States has no material interests in West Africa. We have no trade there, hence the fate of the Congo basin and its people does not concern us.

It is true we have no direct trade with West Africa. But that is because we have thus far been content to leave it in English and Belgian hands. The United States imports every year crude rubber to the value of $30,000,000 and over. Of this amount $11,000,000, more than one-third, comes from Liverpool and Antwerp. It is safe to assume that the larger part, if not all of this European rubber thus imported, came originally from West Africa. There seems to be no reason, barring the present system of collecting in Congo, which excludes free trade with the natives, why we should not have purchased this rubber direct and paid for it with our cotton goods, for which American manufacturers are now so anxiously seeking a market. We have the interest of the open door in Africa. To insist on the right of free trade, guaranteed us by the charter of the Free State, is, nothing less than to free the native from the weight of an intolerable slavery with which he is now oppressed.

But that is not all. To assert that the United States has no interest in West Africa is to overlook the fact that one large element of our population is directly descended from the native tribes there, and that the relations of the white man and the black man in Africa are merely another aspect of a problem which for nearly a hundred years has been almost continuously the focus of political interest in America. Such an assertion overlooks further the fact that there exists today a state in Africa founded by American philanthropy. Liberia owes its existence, tradition, its social and political problems and 12,000 of its present population to the United States.

Meanwhile in the United States men of the negro race have come forward, who, having a sense of the great destiny which awaits their race, if it can acquire some measure of the political sagacity and habits of industry in which the white race excels it, has deliberately undertaken to raise the moral and intellectual level of a whole people, to make it competent to successfully compete with the white man for an existence on his own soil, and to give to it a culture and a race consciousness of its own, such as alone can preserve it effectually from the degradation in some form or other of a spiritual and industrial slavery.

What result the uplifting of the American negro is to have on the world we can at present only guess. Already the industrial education the negro has acquired in the United States has begun to react upon other members of the race in Africa. Teachers from Booker T. Washington's school at Tuskegee, at the solicitation of the German and English governments, have gone and are going in larger numbers every year to Africa to introduce the cotton culture among the natives. Other negroes have gone out as bearers of that higher and more intimate gift of our culture, the Christian religion. It seems likely that the two things, the religious teaching and the industrial training should, and will eventually, go together. Meanwhile vast projects are being formulated by the English and German colonizers, based on the possibility of the employment and colonization of American negroes, who have made progress enough to act as teachers and instructors of the native people. England, as part of the magnificent project with which she is now occupied for opening up for cultivation the vast areas in the Soudan, is looking forward as one possibility to the settlement of American negroes there. Should it be the destiny of the American negro in the near future to bring effectually under the influences of our civilization the wild peoples of Africa, can there be any question that the interests of the United States would become very real and material in Central Africa?

A final and fatal error in regard to this whole matter is that of a comfortable optimism which assumes that the protest which the devoted men now in Central Africa, at the risk of their lives and of their future usefulness to the people there, are now making to the nations may be allowed to go unheeded, and that matters will somehow in the future mend themselves.

That is to misread the whole history of the Congo State. Such a view fails to see that the one steady purpose of the Congo government in its relation with the Powers has been to free itself from the obligations imposed upon it at the Berlin Conference, and by its subsequent treaties with the nations of Europe and America. It misses the point of the whole policy of the King in regard to the Congo, which has ever been independence—independence of the Powers, independence of the Belgian people and parliament, independence of everything and everybody that could possibly hinder his absolute, untrammelled and undefined control over this vast territory entrusted to him, and the labor, the lives, and, yes, the souls of its people.

This view overlooks the fact that in the realm of international law at least rights cannot be maintained unless they are exercised. Merely for the purpose of preserving the remnant of authority they still have, in spite of all possible lapses, over Leopold and the Congo State, neither the Powers nor our own government can afford to let this appeal for justice go unanswered.

But such a view overlooks also certain facts whose significance, as yet only vaguely defined, is ominous for the future.

In the last official bulletin of the governor-general, missionaries in the Congo State, charged with the vague and uncertain crime of "undermining the authority of the State," are threatened with the "decree of September 15, 1889," and with the power that this decree puts at the disposal of the governor-general "in the case of strangers who use their influence over the natives against the State."

This means, I take it, that the missionaries who take the part of the native against the officers of the State are likely to be expelled from the Congo as enemies of the autocrat who rules there. But there is reason to believe that measures still more desperate are in preparation to put a stop to "this persistent stream of testimony" from the interior of the Dark Continent. Reports of missionaries indicate that new uprisings of the natives may be expected,—as with the continuation of this intolerable tyranny they certainly may,—and that a conspiracy is on foot, in such an eventuality to lay the blame upon the missionaries, whose protests against the iniquitous deeds of the officials of the State, may have in truth inspired the natives with new courage to resist their conquerors and oppressors. In that case the menace of Governor-General Fuchs may be merely the prelude to measures which, if the present appeal remains unanswered, will stop forever the voice of protest, and put an end finally to that "persistent stream of testimony" which has so long troubled the dreams and disarranged the plans of "the Conqueror of the Congo."

ROBERT E. PARK.

THE WHITE MAN IN AFRICA

Not only do the negroes not die off in the face of white civilization in Africa, but they have increased in America, where they were taken by the slave trade. This fact urges on us the belief that these negroes are a great world-race—a race not passing off the stage of human affairs, but one that has an immense amount of history before it. The moulding of that history is in the hands of the European whose superior activity and superior power in arts and crafts gives the mastery; but all that this mastery gives is the power to make the future of the negro and the European prosperous, or to make it one of disaster and misery to both alike. Whatever we do in Africa today, a thousand years hence there will be Africans to thrive or suffer for it.—MARY H. KINGSLEY, in "The Story of West Africa."

The natives of Africa cannot be taught that there are blessings in civilization if they are permitted to be oppressed and to be treated as unworthy of the treatment due to human beings, to be despoiled and enslaved at will by a licentious soldiery. The habit of regarding the aborigines as nothing better than pagan *abid* or slaves dates from Ibrahim Pasha, and must be utterly suppressed before any semblance of civilization can be seen outside the military settlements. When every grain of corn, and every fowl, sheep, goat and cow which is necessary for the troops is paid for in sterling money or its equivalent in necessary goods, then civilization will become irresistible in its influence, and the Gospel even may be introduced; but without impartial justice, both are impossible, certainly never when preceded and accompanied by spoliation, which I fear was too general a custom in the Soudan.—HENRY M. STANLEY, in preface to "In Darkest Africa."

And what a warning lies here for the Western nations! The Congo State is the living embodiment of the evil counsels so lavishly, so thoughtlessly given in connection with native policy in West Africa. In the Congo State we see what these counsels lead to when put into practice. All this talk about the puerility of preserving land tenure, the futility of maintaining native institutions, the efficacy of punitive expeditions, the necessity of teaching the native "the dignity of labor," the cry for territorial concessions, and advocacy of monopoly, and all legislative acts framed in accordance with these views, or with some of them, tend to produce in greater or less degree a state of affairs in Western Africa similar to that which prevails on the Congo. In the case of the Powers, the motives may be of the very best, the intentions honest and sincere: but if once the thin end of the wedge be driven home; if once legislation be passed or acts sanctioned which are founded upon a repudiation of the inherent right of the native to his land and the fruits thereof; if once it be officially admitted that it is legitimate to force the native to give under compulsion that which is purchasable on fair terms, we are committed to a policy of reaction of which no man can prophesy the consequences or the end. To those conceptions tropical Africa opposes her vastness, her climate, and the prolific nature of her peoples. They can be tried; apparent success may attend them for a time; lasting success they will never secure. Tropical Africa *cannot permanently be held down by force*, and in attempting to do so by placing modern engines of destruction in the hands of Africans, Europe will be but digging the grave of her ambitions on African soil.—E. D. MOREL, in "Affairs of West Africa."

THE DESTINY OF THE BLACK MAN

It is becoming more evident every year that one of the most significant phases of the future economic rivalry of the peoples of the world will have its base in the tropics. . . That the pressure to develop the resources of the tropics in the future will be great and continuous and will surpass in intensity anything of the kind in the past, may be taken for certain. . . .

Nearly every tropical country, the economical development of which has been attempted, is at present struggling with the question of the supply of labor for the elementary operations of industry. As the economic pressure of civilization to develop the tropics continues, the cry is everywhere going up for races able to sustain the burden of the development which the tropics are destined to undergo. In response to this pressure it is possible that we shall witness in the future almost as large movements of population in the tropics as history has witnessed in the temperate regions. But it will be the races who are best able, and who are best prepared to take their share in the strenuous development to come to whom the future of the warmer regions of the world belong. It is the gospel of work which will be the gospel of the future in the tropics. . . .

In circumstances like these those who have the true interest of the negro race at heart, and who are aware of the immense possibilities before it in the regions of the world for which it is naturally fitted, see also how urgent and important it is that the negro should be brought under the influence, the training and conditions which would fit him to hold his own in the time to come. They see especially how important it is that there should be brought into being a kind of race-ethos which would set before it certain ends and ideals and steadily aim at attaining them. . . . At a recent conference of the bishops and clergy of Mashnaland on the negro question facts of this kind were strongly insisted on. The necessity of training the race in the conception of work was held to be vital. The necessity for training not only in individual but in social responsibility was held to be largely involved in the discipline of work, and in the education which in time followed in its train. Nothing, it was felt, tended so to depress a race and to handicap it in the future as a low economic state, in which with the absence of all but the most elementary animal wants there was a lack of the first incentive to strenuous and sustained work.

As one looks at the position of the negro in the United States today one cannot help feeling what great possibilities lie before the race in such a country, and what a great part the American negro might play in the gradual creation of such a race-ethos as has here been described. No more powerful influence can operate in the elevation of a people than race-consciousness working toward a worthy ideal by clearly conceived means.—BENJAMIN KIDD in *The Independent*, September 8, 1904.

P. S. FOR A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONGO EVIL one should read H. R. Fox Bourne's "CIVILIZATION IN CONGOLAND", London, 1902, and E. D. Morel's "LEOPOLD'S RULE IN AFRICA", Heinemann, London, now in press. Every public library in America should possess these books. YOU WILL DO THE CAUSE OF CONGO REFORM A SERVICE if you enquire for them and SEE THAT THEY ARE OBTAINED.

FAM. AFRICA Congo